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Writing Sample

Marcin Sendeki

Includes "Certainly," "July the Twenty-first," "This Time There Will Be No Injuries," "Sunday," "Buses and Trams," "Looking Down," "Maciek Tanner, Rhythms," "Fragment," "So Come on," "Sunday," "Smuggled Message," "Swings," "Rerun," "Caution! Sandwiches Sold!," "Cellulose Keepsake," "Come On," "Javaanse Jongens," "The Poodle Springs Story," "Barracks," "Cellulose," "Mirror," "My Barber Watched a TV Series About Jesus," "There'll Be No Casualties This Time," "Carpathian Days," "Buses and Streetcars," "Of Course," "Javaanse Jongens," "Mirror," "The Museum of Banners of the People's Movement," and "From the Heights."

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Marcin SENDECKI

I.

from: *Young Poets of a New Poland. An Anthology*,
translated by Donald Pirie (London: Forest Books/ UNESCO, 1993)

Certainly

It's certainly still too early, but
when is it likely to start? Certainly not
now, a few minutes before seven, certainly
not here, in this train running on the Warsaw-Lublin line
and maybe not even with these people, with all eight, including
me, staring out of the window, at their newspapers and into
their neighbours' eyes, although
it is far easier to cross-check their colour by reaching into
handbags or
hearts

(1986)

July the Twenty-first*

From a bus window: flags gulped up by the wind and
a man in his working clothes, lighting the eternal flame: a test run:
but the thick smoke is real and softly streams up into the air
torn by the boundaries. We're still here, this side of July
where the wooden language of government decrees is on its marks to be
force-fed:and: right here: beneath the thin sunlight dripping with sweat, in
leather clothing, with hands folded over the back of the neck, down paper
trenches, in open mouths, into which we vanish raising glasses and
voices. Right here.

(1986)

*The day before the official holiday that used to celebrate the
foundation of the communist People's Republic (editor's note)

This Time There Will Be No Injuries

This will be a holiday, sudden and sublime, full of sunshine and shiny new shoes. This time megaphones will not let us down, boys will spit joyously from high balconies and meat, oh, meat will cruise down streets while we light cigarettes from flaming torches. And there will be so many words, clear as copper, as church doors. It will be a holiday, and we will eat cakes.

(1989)

Sunday

My heart is in my pocket - Frank O'Hara

Light smoothly oversteps frontiers of glassiness,
mingles with breath and smoke of cigarettes.
Yellow paint peels off walls, flakes over bedlinen,
stalks of fixtures and fittings, and a table's clear surface.
My heart lies before me, inert.

Buses and Trams

Newspapers live faster and faster. Now you also have your place in their mouths, as you read, over the shoulder of some youngster, some of your own words. The yellow stills advance, money and addresses melt in your pockets.

(1989)

Looking Down

Looking down from the second floor you can see a car park, the narrow towers of an Orthodox church and scales of plaster on the bodies of tall blocks shedding their skin, further off, beyond this wall, people move down streets, swallowing syllables, a ribbon of rainwater tightens around the throat

walking down the staircase you see children run into a poodle's hoop,
beads of sweat roll down foreheads, and you hear, behind you, the commands
shouted by a seven-year old leader, a little way on you stand still, the
umbrella's canvas when fingered on the inside lets rain through, your wet hair stiffens,
a one-hundred zloty note with Waryński's face on it, hidden inside my
jacket, shivers with cold, you'll spend him in a while, exchanging him for
tobacco and matches; as if that kiosk was the headquarters of the secret police or a *bureau*
de change of the elements: it's July, and life - put off until some later date - folds up
into a single lump and fits in an inside pocket;

(1987)

II.

from *Altered State. The New Polish Poetry*, edited by Rod Mengham,
Tadeusz Pióro & Piotr Szymor, translations by Tadeusz Pióro
(Todmorden, Lancs: Arc, 2003.)

Maciek Tanner, Rhythms

Warmth in mouth. Everyone
good to me. Everything shouts out
and everything curls,
withers and lands here. Everything
good. Potatoes, letters, digging
potatoes. I won't tell you any
true stories.

In(

Get drunk quick and sleep, secret
garden in greyed earth. Hidden in
cough, lungs' few beats). There's
petrol in my mouth, I cultivate it, burn.

to Marcin Swietlicki

Goodnight, dark. Fat slaps in
glass. Ugly teeth bite wax apple.
Utensils, plates and nails slick, we have
slumber. And in slumber nestle glossy
postcards: butterfly, mermaid, two-dicked snake.

Clotted sun, soot and sated frost. I look
as you speak. No knowledge that snow
moves low and I name the coat, ash and the rest of things.

Cuts, warm. buildings in a drop of resin
spat off a train. In each a ball of thread,
a violet face: stretch sticky fingers, one
move, the slightest.

Fragment

Each line of this poem pulls
a different way. Thus a rat
runs between the lines while
the title - aimed at the sun - wallows
in a sea of virtual leaves.
The way you like it? So let's have it.

So Come on

Shadows shine off billboards. After
he crossed the tracks, the boy stopped and
hurried the dog. Don't expect a
miracle, it's a matter-of-fact shot. This
is a chair. Table's here.

Dust seems lighter, leaves
breathe: slow, careful.
We've made love now we're
talking. Bronze beads swell and
fade with each eyelid movement.

Sunday

My heart is in my pocket - Frank O'Hara

Light seeps through glass frontiers,
merges with breath and cigarette smoke.
Yellow paint descends from walls, covers bedding, :
stalks of objects and the bright table top. My heart
lies before me, doesn't move.

Smuggled Message

: hands that raised now cool
hugging knees, touching glass: legs
tired of marching, still, in body
bags, ascending stairs; lungs, burnt,
choke on water, blood swallows salt.
We're coming to town.

(89/90)

Swings

Dust train.
Let it come and eat.
And who haunted the tracks
when the really good time was the last.

Rerun

Had a bit of a breakdown in logistics, something
like the charge of the light blockade from the canteen to the department
head's office. Plus the exterminators on the top floor. Heads
rolled like famed rockets into the right slots on the pay scale. All
we got here was a reprimand. Some wagered to advantage.
Did you see what flowed out of the answering machine? Toner and blood.

Caution! Sandwiches Sold!

The world, who else, is begging for a snide remark.
Caps, courtyard entrance. Red and yellow shoals of mobiles. Golden
chairs stacked up. Tongue was sharp, but got frayed.
Let's go in to check if they're really there. They are.

Cellulose Keepsake

Now lie down in a clean bed.
Now change your clothes, we'll burn these.
The view from an upstairs window and the view
from downstairs joined and told.
And now time for some unpleasantness.

That's understandable. After a night on deck the sun
seems so instructive, closing your eyes is out
of the question. And looking is worth it. As it turns out,
a butt flung on wet earth hits a frozen clod.
Non-stop action, no commercial breaks.

Regardless. Inevitable.
Drowning to glean irrefutable knowledge.
Dry your hair and change.
Then find a shady spot.
Sleep will come softly as a rain of defoliants.

III.

from a chapbook prepared for the Poetry International Festival
Rotterdam 2001

Translations by Barbara Plebanek and Tony Howard

Come On

Shadows shine from the billboards. Having
crossed the track the boy stops and
hurries up the dog. Don't expect
a miracle from a material photograph. This
is a chair. This - a table.

Javaanse Jongens

a sour beginning after a doubtful end.
in the dip there are some shavings, faeces, labels.
a ticket bathes in the gunge, changing colour, she didn't even twitch, right?
narrow stairs lead to the roof.

The Poodle Springs Story

It's not my town. i was smoking
a cigarette, i take a long walk across the room
to finish it off.

you can hear a dog, i see
a car in the driveway. you'll
speak through the smooth surface of useful

things. our photograph's in
the publisher's window, though there's no
reason. i'm fit

as bourbon and i pick up from
the doorstep a printed
envelope.

if you want to see me
come in and close
the door

Barracks

Our mistakes are not disinterested.
You went on a trip without your ID, girl?
We were running away so fast, they lost their flip-flops.
In the morning from the balcony she saw the sea.

He said the meals were amusing, the people alright.
I got a clean room with a view of the roof.
I asked her to leave at least one copy.
You will receive a stamp album as a reward.

They don't accept the provisional arrangement, then?
He was seen in the new part of town.
We go through the invoices, bills, receipts.
I can give you nothing more.

Commendation, special commendation, names and
achievements recorded in the chronicle or the book of merit,
a mention in dispatches, a letter of commendation with a photo
against the billowing regimental standard.

Cellulose

Now lie down in a clean bed.
Now get changed, and they'll burn that.
The view from the first floor window has been combined
with the ground floor view, and described.
And now it's time for the unpleasantness.

It's understandable. After a night on the boat the sun
seems so instructive that there's no way
you can close your eyes. But it's worth a look. As it turns out
the butt tossed on the sodden ground falls onto frozen earth.
Continuous performance, no commercial breaks.

It's indiscreet. It's unavoidable.
To drown just to reach compelling knowledge.
To dry your hair and change your clothes.
Then to seek out a shady spot.
Sleep will come quietly like defoliant rain.

Mirror

For Marcin Baran

All photographs undoubtedly faithful. The light
will change and cross out the colours. The dun nape of the orthodox
church and the pillaged park will blacken like the locals' teeth. He prepares
a report, inserts pins in the map which he drew with drooping eyes.
He's sick from laughter, he's transferred from nowhere.

My Barber Watched a TV Series About Jesus

A very clever man. And the way he
done them miracles, jammy bugger. All
fixed, no way he done it himself. I pay.
Go to the door. Put my hat on. Fall.
Rise. And I see it clearly, the soles
of my shoes are slippery as ice.

There'll Be No Casualties This Time

It'll be a carnival today, sudden and sublime, full
of the sun and shiny shoes. This
time the microphones won't go wrong, the boys will
spit happily down from the balconies and meat, meat
will emerge into the streets, we'll light our cigarettes with flaming
torches. And there'll be so many words, bright as copper, as
the church door. It'll be a carnival, we shall eat cake.

(1989)

xxx

Everything's smaller. I got off the tram and
I'm comparing the landscape to my directions.
A rook. A little girl sticking two pink fingers
in her mouth. You can't get lost.

Ugly door. Grimy stairs. I counted
the steps; four, so not much grime. I ring.
I stay there, in there. Leave. It's darker. Not

even any snow. You couldn't see too well, but
it said the tram would come in
twelve minutes. There's a book in my pocket,
matches and tobacco. I know nothing.

from: *Metre*, Autumn 2002. Translation by Cathal McCabe

Carpathian Days

I might have known: You want to go on Monday?
Me, I'd go on another day. The usual superstition. Or lack of organization.
I could have gone on another day, but Monday I'm at the Stadium,
watching the wonderful world go by. A man with no legs
by a booth, a woman beneath an umbrella. (This the view from the stall.)

Then all of a sudden here comes the bus.

There's nothing worse than a broken-down bus.
If it doesn't conk out, we'll be there after dark, on Tuesday.
So fingers crossed the engine not stall.
National Express: the last word in organization!
On the train at least you can stretch your legs.
Nobody knows if we stop in Garwolin.

We didn't. But we've fifteen minutes in Ryki.
My neighbour gets out for a fag, then walks around the bus.
Across the aisle a girl sips a Coke, legs
in the air, ugly as sin. She's not going back till Wednesday
when her man goes into the army. Which calls for organization
of vodka, some chairs and a stool.

A driver needs to have nerves of steel.
One false move and instead of the station in Lublin
we stop for good at the mortuary. What kind of organization
- this, next day, in the papers - lets a hysteric drive its bus?
We'll be an item till Thursday,
at least. On the evening news my corpse, its legs.

Alive, we drive on. The girl sits so I can see her legs
then covers them - damn! - along with the scars where the little steel
pins (or needles) went in. The neighbour suggests they go out some night, Friday
he picks up his wage. They could spend the weekend in Krasnystaw,
two whole days! Immediately everyone sat on the bus
gives a cheer. We're all one happy family, one well-oiled organization.

It's getting late. - The driver is taking some corners! - Every organization
chokes in the end on itself, kicks the proverbial bucket. Both legs.
Same with memory. You just wait. Years on, the bus
sways beneath a great magnet, today shards of memory, shards of steel.
Till when I'm sat at the station in Zamosc.
Till then! (Then being this coming Saturday.)

If I show up. To think of the organization involved in exchanging addresses!
Some Monday,
no doubt, I'll throw this piece of paper away. Legless, no
doubt, in Tomaszow.
Leant against the bus, with a damp cigarette, I'll watch the wind seize it -
and lose it in style.

from: Chicago Review, vol. 45, numbers 3 & 4 / 1999.

Translations by William Martin

Buses and Streetcars

Newspapers keep living life faster. Now even you
fit between their lips, reading, over
a young man's shoulder, a few of your own
words. The yellow boxes move on, money and
addresses melt in your pockets;

(1989)

from: Chicago Review, vol. 46, numbers 3 & 4 / 2000.

Translations by William Martin

Of Course

Of course, it's impossible to know, in her Saturday
dress she walks down the street, lipstick drowning
in the wind's wet current. The asphalt is soft, it touches
lips, breasts, the bedsheets bum, eyes wander
arier the legs. Ragged smoke cuts through skin and mucus,
nails choke on a whisper, cheeks and fingers glisten,
stunned, adjusting the unfastened button (the clasp
of a bag?). The conjunctiva bum, the head, drawn back,
notes the rhythm, the color and cut of the blouse. It can't be,
not now and not a week from now, of course,
known;

the sour beginning after the dubious ending.
in the recesses, peelings, droppings, labels.
a faded ticket stub swims in the tar. and she didn't even flinch?
narrow steps lead to the roof.

Mirror

For Marcin Baran

All photographs are faithful without a doubt. The light changes
and deletes the colors. The orthodox church's grizzled neck
and the pillaged park blacken like the local populace's teeth. He
prepares a report, pushes pins into a map that he drew with his eyes shut.
Sick from laughing, displaced from nowhere.

The Museum of Banners of the People's Movement

lives on off showing me its ruined doors:

someone clearly slipped up, the signal got stuck on the line,
but the dispatcher lit up a Camel and immediately
died of cancer and heart disease.

The rest is invariant,

just exhibit this, with a microphone to my lips
I wade in deep snow, then my amp breaks down.

From the Heights

From the heights of the third floor you can see the parking lot,
little domes of orthodox churches, flakes of plaster on bodies
of buildings shedding skin, further on, behind the wall,
people pace the streets swallowing syllables, their larynxes cinched
with ribbons of rain, on the way down you see children dodging
into hoops of puddles, drops on their drenched faces, and hear,
just behind you, their seven-year-old commander's orders, further
on, you stop, the canvas of your umbrella, touched from below,
leaks, wet hair congeals, tucked in your shirt a damp Warynski
on the banknote shivers in the cold, in a second you'll hand him
over for matches, tobacco: as if that kiosk were the Okhrana's
station or an exchange for converting the elements:
it's July, life - saved up for later - gets wadded in
a cube and held in an inside pocket;

Translated by William Martin

For a photo essay in which Sendekci's "From the Heights" is included go to

<http://fototapeta.art.pl/2001/wwwmge.php>
